The World of Letters as Others See It

The Long Arm of Coincidence.

IN the romance of rare books a thousand and one strange and almost incredible tales are involved. A clerk in a Boston book store happened to read that the only known copy of Edgar Allan Poe's "Tamerlane" was in the possession of the British Museum. Believing that to be improbable, he made up his mind that he would hunt for a second copy. Within half an hour he found one. On his way to lunch he stopped at a second hand book stall and began to rummage through the volumes that, regarded as of little value, had been tossed haphazard into a counter box. The first title to catch his eye was "Tamerlane and Other Poems, by a Bostonian, 1827." The dealer was selling from that box in lots of ten. The clerk bought "Tamerlane" and nine other volumes for $1.50. Soon after he sold the "Tamerlane" for $1,950. It was later resold for $2,050 and then for $2,400. At the latest sale it brought $11,000. There is current a story that only a few months ago a Yale undergraduate bought in Waterbury, Conn., two books for $1.25, and that for them he has been offered $3,000.—*From "The Romance of Rare Books" in the "Mentor."*

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The Exaggeration of the Artist.

IN the same way it is perfectly true that Dickens had running through his whole work an indistinct element of exaggeration, but that exaggeration is itself exaggerated. He exaggerated in the same fashion that all poets and artists of a certain somewhat flamboyant type always do emphasize or overemphasize certain things. He exaggerated in literature as Turner, for instance, exaggerated in painting—another great Englishman full of very much the same kind of highly colored energy and imagination. You all know the old story about Turner and the realistic critic. It is a chestnut, but it is the business of these solemn occasions to repeat stories for the thousandth time: the story of the man who, when Turner was painting a sunset, said to him: "It is all very well, Mr. Turner, but I never saw a sunset like that!" And Turner said: "Don't you wish you could?" — *From "Charles Dickens." By G. K. Chesterton in "The Dickensian."*

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London Literary Landmarks Passing.

ONE views the destruction of things with life in them as one views unnecessary cruelty. There should be special powers granted to the Society in Buckingham Street to stay the speculative hand. Now has been destroyed a shop which Charles Lamb knew, which existed for the youthful Dickens and boys of his age as one of London's many treasure chambers, from the windows of which in other days citizens purchased clocks almost as fantastic in design as the shop itself. We can imagine the type of trusty shopman sent twice weekly by his master to meet the Birmingham mail on its arrival and take over from the coach proprietors a parcel of silver forks and spoons. Kind old shop, full of worldly vanities tempting the pocket, outside St. Peter's gate, I had never the money to buy a bracket clock shaped in churchy style, but I shall miss the friendly face that looked out on Cornhill and carried so many reflections!—*From the Manchester Guardian.*

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Dostoievsky's Intellectual Sovereignty.

IF the age has one intellectual sovereign it is Dostoievsky. His power over the soul of the young is incalculable, it is a genuine fascination, the feverish intensity of his novels is fit food for youth—just what the pathos of Schiller was for them a hundred and fifty years ago—he breaks his way through concrete descriptions of social life to the absolute, to the Divine—young people of all countries think that they can recognize their own inmost self in the characters that he creates—and no other is heir to the throne of intellectual supremacy, and who could dispute this—save one, the hundredth anniversary of whose death is already approaching, and whose development as an intellectual power of the highest quality not only as an artist but also as a philosopher, an enchanter of spirits, a true leader of souls, with power moreover to quench the thirst after religion, mellows in deliberate majesty? Goethe; his hour is ever approaching, but has not yet dawned, he is ever opening new gates, new vistas, leading to the sublime center of all things, as pilgrims gain admittance to an Egyptian temple.—*From "The Intellectual Decay of Europe." By Hugo von Hofmannsthal in the "Art Review."*

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Translators of "The Arabian Nights."

ANTOINE GALLAND, Edward William Lane, John Payne and Richard Burton—those are the four outstanding names in connection with "The Arabian Nights," so far as the English speaking reader is concerned, for, though Galland was a Frenchman, England and America first came to know of the tales through the medium of his discoveries. The work and methods of the four may be summed up briefly. In the original the "Arabian Nights Entertainment" reeks with Oriental sex and its ramifications. Galland made a much expurgated adaptation for the people; Lane, a century and a quarter later, went almost the limit in freedom of expression; Payne went the limit, and Burton, with his explanatory annotations, went *beyond the limit.* The British authorities were urged to take action against Payne on the ground of public morality. Burton, though a defier of convention and a man of reckless courage, was not one to take unnecessary risks, so he arranged to have his version of "The Arabian Nights" published nominally by a society with the appropriate name, "The Kama Shastra"—that is, the "Cupid-Gospel Society," also called the "Hindu Love Society," Kama being the Hindu god of love.—*From "How the Arabian Nights Came to Us," in the "Mentor."*

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Walter Scott's American Correspondent.

THE neglect of English people to put the right stamps on their foreign letters may cause a lot of indignation on the Continent, but it may be doubted whether anybody is so heavily mulcted as was Sir Walter Scott on one occasion. "One morning last spring," he told Lockhart, "I opened a huge lump of a dispatch, never doubting that it had traveled under some omnipotent frank like that of the First Lord of the Admiralty's, when, lo and behold, the contents proved to be a manuscript play by a young lady in New York, who requested me kindly to read and correct it, equip it with a prologue and an epilogue, procure for it a favorable reception from the manager of Drury Lane, and make Murray or Constable bleed handsomely for the copyright; and on inspecting the cover I found that I had been charged £5 odd for the postage. That was bad enough, but as there was no help I groaned and submitted. A fortnight or so after another packet, of not less formidable bulk, arrived, and I was absent enough to break its seal too without examination. Conceive my horror when out jumped the same identical tragedy of 'The Cherokee Lovers,' and a second epistle from the authoress stating that as the winds had been boisterous she feared the vessel intrusted with her former communication might have foundered, and therefore she judged it prudent to forward a duplicate."—*From the Manchester Guardian.*

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Thomas Hardy at Seventy-nine.

HE came in at last, a little old man (dressed in tweeds after the manner of a country squire) with the same round skull and the same goblin eyebrows, and the same eyes keen and alert. What was it that he reminded me of? a night hawk? a falcon owl? for I tell you, the eyes that looked out of that century old skull were of the kind that see in the dark. I found him as full of interesting conversation as ever. He told me, for instance, that he considered it possible that John Keats on the occasion of his landing at Lulworth, at the time he composed his last sonnet, may have gone to visit relations at a village called Broadmayne, which lies between Dorchester and Winfrith, quite some distance inland. He himself, he said, remembered people of the same name who lived in this village and were stablemen like Keats's own father, one of them, so he asserted, born about 1800, being remarkably like John Keats in appearance. I spoke of some wooden stocks that I had come upon while visiting Cerne Abbas and he assured me that he could remember well as a boy seeing a man in the pillory at Dorchester. — *From "Glimpses of Thomas Hardy." By Llewelyn Powys in the Dial.*

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Richard Burton; Traveler and Adventurer.

BURTON was a great man, a great traveler and adventurer, who practically led to the discovery of the sources of the Nile; a wonderful linguist, he was acquainted with twenty-nine languages: he was a man of genius; only, the fact is, he was not a great writer. Continually thwarted by the English Government, he was barred from some of the most famous expeditions by the folly of his inferiors who ignorantly supposed they were his superiors; and as Sir H. H. Johnston says in some of his notes not only was Burton treated unjustly but, his famous pilgrimage to Mecca won him no explicit recognition from the Indian Government; his great discoveries in Africa, Brazil, Syria and Trieste were never appreciated; and, worst of all, he was refused the post of British Minister in Morocco; it was persistently denied him. He adds: "Had he gone there we might long since have known—what we do not know—the realities of Morocco."—*From "A Neglected and Mysterious Genius." By Arthur Symons in the Forum.*

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Another View of Sir Richard Burton.

IN the army he had been known as "Ruffian Dick," not by way of disparagement but because of his furious fighting qualities and because he had fought in single combat more enemies than perhaps any other man of his time. After his return from Mecca a number of British officers, including a friend of Burton's named Hawkins, were one evening lounging outside Shepheard's Hotel in Cairo. As they were talking and smoking there passed repeatedly in front of them an Arab in his loose flowing robes, with head proudly erect and the peculiar swinging stride of a son of the desert. Little by little he drew nearer to the knot of officers till at last, as he swept by, the flying folds of his burnoose brushed against one of the officers. "Curse that nigger's impudence!" said the officer. "If he does that again I'll kick him." Whereupon the dignified Arab stopped, wheeled around and said: "Well, d—— it, Hawkins, that's a fine way to welcome a fellow after two years' absence." "It's Ruffian Dick!" cried the astonished officer.—*From "How the Arabian Nights Came to Us" in the "Mentor."*

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Anthony Trollope's Country.

"TO me Barset has been a real county, and its city a real city, and the spires and towers have been before my eyes, and the voices of the people are known to my ears, and the pavements of the city ways are familiar to my footsteps." Trollope's boast, or confession, can be echoed by most of his modern readers: Barsetshire lives chiefly as a cult, and the profane seldom violate the Cathedral precincts, or flutter the roofs that cawed answer to the Archdeacon's "Good heavens!" after his first call on the Proudies. For the initiated, Barchester has reality, and how different a thing is reality in literature from realism! Only a few isolated figures in letters stand out as real: Sir Roger de Coverley, I suppose, Mr. Pickwick certainly, and of course Sherlock Holmes, who should have had his statue erected in Baker street before ever Kensington Gardens were dedicated to Peter Pan: most of us could name a dozen, chosen with a certain amount of individual caprice, but hardly more, of such characters. Such characters, I mean, as create a real illusion; so that a man attaining heaven might look round him and say, "And now, where's Pickwick? Oh, no, I forgot; of course he's only a character in a book!"—*From "A Ramble in Barsetshire." By R. A. Knox in the "London Mercury."*

What You Should Know About American Authors

I. Winston Churchill.

FOR many years it seemed as if Winston Churchill had definitely linked his literary work with the letter "C." It stood out in title after title, "The Celebrity," "Richard Carvel," "Coniston," "The Crisis," "The Crossing," "Mr. Crewe's Career," "A Modern Chronicle" and "The Inside of the Cup." Then one day he announced for a projected novel a title that at first sight gave no suggestion of the persistent letter. It was "And the Greatest of These." But then some one remembered that "the greatest of these is Charity."

Winston Churchill.

Winston Churchill was graduated from the Naval Academy at Annapolis in 1894, ranking among the first five or six in his class. As an undergraduate he played on the varsity eleven. Resigning from the navy at graduation, he was employed for a time on the *Army and Navy Journal*, and then acted for about a year as the assistant and managing editor of the *Cosmopolitan Magazine*. His first published book was "The Celebrity," which attracted rather more attention than it deserved for the reason that readers persisted in clinging to the belief that it was intended as a lampooning of Richard Harding Davis. Mr. Churchill has always denied having ever entertained the slightest idea of holding Mr. Davis or any one else up to ridicule in "The Celebrity," and in the introduction to one of the volumes of the posthumous edition of Mr. Davis's works he paid high and feeling tribute to the memory of the creator of Van Bibber.

But though first published "The Celebrity" was not in point of time Mr. Churchill's first book. He began "Richard Carvel" first, and spent four years in writing it. The labor was well repaid, for "Richard Carvel," appearing in 1899, rode on the very crest of the wave that was then sweeping the historical novel, especially the historical novel dealing with the American Revolution, on to a prosperity never before known in the annals of the writing of fiction. One way to indicate concretely the astonishing success of the book is to recall that once an industrious person of a statistical turn of mind figured that 4,000 spruce trees had to be cut down in order that "Richard Carvel" might be printed.

Always orderly and methodical, a maker of voluminous notes and rigidly forcing himself to write according to a fixed schedule, Mr. Churchill's works subsequent to "Richard Carvel" have appeared with fine regularity, one every two years. In 1901 it was "The Crisis," a tale of the civil war, beginning in St. Louis at the outbreak of the struggle, and showing Grant, then a failure, an object of ridicule because of his belief in his ability to handle a regiment. Then came "The Crossing," a kind of pictorial history of the Clark expedition, a chronicle of border warfare, of Indian treachery and ghastly massacres.

Then, turning away from the historical novel, Mr. Churchill wrote the first of his books dealing with political corruption as it existed in New England a generation or so ago. That was "Coniston," in which appeared the most vital and enduring of the characters that he has so far limned, Jethro Bass, the man who, originally a simple farmer, becomes the undisputed party boss, ruling despotically an entire State, its banks, its franchises, its Governor and its Legislature. In the same field, but written in a somewhat lighter vein, was "Mr. Crewe's Career." Then came "A Modern Chronicle," in which the author for the first time ventured to make woman, the American woman of to-day, his central point of interest. In 1913 came "The Inside of the Cup," a novel devoted to studying certain problems of the church and modern Christianity, to enjoy a popularity as great as that of "Richard Carvel" fourteen years before. Subsequent books by Mr. Churchill have been "A Far Country," "The Dwelling Place of Light," "A Traveller in War Time" and "Doctor Jonathan."